

"Marshlands" - John Ball House  
On grounds of College of Charleston Marine  
Biological Laboratories, Fort Johnson  
(south shore of Charleston Bay, approxi-  
mately 4.1 miles east of State Route #171)  
Charleston Vicinity  
Charleston County  
South Carolina

HABS No. SC-259

HABS  
SC  
10-CHARLY  
6-

PHOTOGRAPHS  
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey  
National Park Service  
Eastern Office, Design and Construction  
143 South Third Street  
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

"MARSHLANDS" - JOHN BALL HOUSE

Location: On grounds of College of Charleston Marine Biological Laboratories, Fort Johnson (south shore of Charleston Bay, approximately 4.1 miles east of State Route #171), Charleston Vicinity, Charleston County, South Carolina.

Present Owner: College of Charleston, Charleston, South Carolina.

Present Occupant: Unoccupied.

Present Use: Not in use, pending restoration.

Brief Statement of Significance: A fine rice-plantation house with elaborate and refined architectural details.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

## A. Physical History:

1. Original and subsequent owners: Built for John Ball, later acquired by Nathaniel Heyward, who devised it to his daughter, Elizabeth. Later acquired by the United States Government, as part of the Navy Yard at Charleston. [Harriette Kershaw Leiding, Historic Houses of South Carolina (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Co., 1921), pp. 18-19] Acquired in 1961 by the College of Charleston and moved to the present site. [News and Courier, Charleston, South Carolina, December 11, 1961]
2. Date of erection: 1810 [Leiding, op. cit., p. 18]
3. Notes on alterations and additions: Bathrooms were installed in the first and second stories, and one room was divided to provide a kitchen in the first story. These alterations appear to have been made during the present century, when the building was used as a residence of officers of the U. S. Navy.

In 1961 the first and second floors were removed from their high basement story and moved. The basement was demolished. As of this date the house remains jacked up, and the reclaimed bricks from the basement are stored at 6 Glebe Street, Charleston, South Carolina. The two brick chimneys were taken out before the house was moved.

The original location of the house, before being moved to the present site at Fort Johnson, was on the west bank of the Cooper River, seven miles north of Charleston.

4. Important Old Views: Stoney, Simons and Lapham, Plantations of the Carolina Low Country (Charleston: Carolina Art Association, 1938), pp. 204-207, gives several photographs of this house before it was moved. Of particular interest are two views by Benjamin J. Lutchez which show the south side (main front) and north side of the building on its original site, before the basement was demolished.

## PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

### A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: An example of lavish and excellently executed gouge work and more conventional Adam style enrichment, in rooms of ample scale and fine proportions, well preserved in their original state.
2. Condition of fabric: At present this structure is awaiting a permanent foundation. There are some cracks in the plaster, due partly to moving and partly to removal of chimneys and mantels before moving (the mantels are in the rooms but have not yet been re-installed). Paint is peeling in places. Some ornamental plaster is damaged but its condition is generally good. Wood trim is generally in excellent condition except that repeated layers of paint have obscured corners and edges considerably. Flooring is in a condition virtually as good as new. The frame appears to be in excellent condition.

### B. Technical Description of Exterior:

1. Over-all dimensions: About 58' x 61', 2 $\frac{1}{2}$  stories (formerly over a high basement story). The house now faces north, although its original orientation was to the south.
2. Foundations: Originally of brick--now demolished
3. Wall construction: Framing with studs about 4" x 4", clapboards nailed direct to studding; heavy timber sill and girts. Framing is of longleaf yellow pine. Clapboards are of cypress, 5 $\frac{1}{2}$ " exposure, with moulded lower edge. The inside is covered with split lath and lime plaster.

An interesting detail of the sill construction was described by Mr. L. A. Chitwood, Jr., the contractor who moved the building. Along the top of the brick wall was placed a thin wooden plate, about  $1\frac{1}{2}$ " thick. Above this were laid small wood strips, spaced two feet apart, across the plate; the heavy timber sill was laid over these strips, leaving ventilating spaces so that air could circulate around the sill. The innermost portion of the brick wall was carried up between floor joists, however, to prevent drafts and vermin from getting under the floors. The ends of the studs rest on the sill, as was customary then. / Interview with L. A. Chitwood, Jr., Charleston, S. C., June 18, 1962. /

4. Porches: Across the main front (originally the south, now the north) is a one-story wooden porch of seven bays with slender Doric columns. It has an interior cornice with modillions and dentils, a plain frieze, and an architrave with a carved guilloche band along it. The exterior porch entablature has S-shaped modillions and dentils in the cornice, a plain frieze and a moulded architrave. There is a simple railing. The porch has been screened, apparently in fairly recent years. This porch was formerly approached by a straight flight of stone stairs, supported on brick arches, with a simple wooden railing on each side, the stairs being located on axis (now demolished).

At the center of the rear front (originally the north, now the south) is a small wooden entrance porch at the first floor level. It has slender Doric columns at the corners carrying a simple lintel at the sides; it has a segmental arch at the front, which is continued by the porch ceiling. Formerly this porch was on a brick base, with a stairway (now demolished) similar to that of the front porch. There is a simple railing.

5. Chimneys: Formerly there were two large brick chimney stacks, now removed (for location see plan description, below).

6. Openings:

- a. Doorways and doors: Two entrances, quite similar, are located on axis of the main and rear fronts. The one now located on the north (formerly south) has a six-panel door, reeded pilasters with ball capitals, architrave and frieze decorated with gouge work, and a cornice with modillions and ornate dentils. There is a rectangular transom light with a sunburst motif; side lights have double hung sash with a wood panel below, each sash with wood muntins in the form of an inverted ogee arch intersecting an upright ogee arch. The rear doorway is simpler on the exterior. Both have doors  $3'-10\frac{1}{2}" \times 7'-5\frac{1}{2}" \times 1\frac{3}{4}"$ .

- b. Windows and shutters: Sash are double hung, nine lights over nine lights, formerly with louvred shutters on the exterior. Exterior trim is a moulded architrave, with a heavy solid sill.

7. Roof:

- a. Shape, covering: The high portion of the house has a hip roof; the main porch and low portion of the house have hip roofs. All are covered with sheet metal, standing seams. Pitch of the main roof is 8" vertically to 12" horizontally.
- b. Framing: Rafters are about 3" x 7", 24" on centers, resting on a heavy timber plate about 6" deep. Sheathing boards are about 6" wide.
- c. Cornice: Wooden cornice with modillions. This also extends along the rake of the front gable, but is merely placed above the house cornice at the gable--mouldings are not split as a true pediment would be treated. Around the main roof is a concealed metal gutter.
- d. Dormers: There are two hipped dormers on the main front, and one at each end, with 6/6 double hung sash. At the center of the main front is a gable with semi-circular window. At the center of the rear front is a larger hipped dormer, which lights the stair hall, with a triple window of Palladian shape, but without pilasters or entablature.

C. Technical Description of Interiors:

1. Floor plans:

- a. First floor: Central hall with two rooms on each side. The hall is divided into a front portion, containing the stairway, and a smaller rear portion. The front rooms are about square, and are deeper than the rear rooms. Between the front and rear rooms, on each side, is a space for the chimneys, with a passage between rooms along the outer walls and a closet next to the hall partitions.

The left rear room has been divided in modern times into a kitchen, bathroom, and pantry. The rear portion is one story in height.

Ceiling height is approximately 13'-3".

"MARSHLANDS" - JOHN BALL HOUSE  
HABS No. SC-259 (Page 5)

- b. Second floor: Central hall with one room on each side. There is an alcove, with window, on each side of the chimney space. Ceiling height is approx. 11'-9". Two modern bathrooms have been built into the front part of the hall.
  - c. Attic: Two finished rooms under the roof slope, one on each side of a central hall.
2. Stairway:
- a. First floor: 26 risers, two landings; lower flight is the longest. Open string. Brackets with scrolls under projecting treads. Two balusters to each tread are straight, rectangular in section  $3/4"$  x  $1\ 1/16"$ ; a simple moulded handrail forms a spiral at the newel. A wooden wainscot, paneled with narrow applied mouldings, carries up above the wall string, with a moulding corresponding to the handrail at the top. There is moulded wood paneling under the outer string of the lower flight.
  - b. Second floor: Two approximately equal flights, one landing, 23 risers. Design is generally comparable to first floor stair.
3. Flooring: Flooring is single, 1" thick tongue and grooved longleaf yellow pine boards varying from  $3\frac{1}{2}"$  to 5" in width. Finish is natural.
4. Wall and ceiling finish: Plastered and painted throughout.
5. Interior trim:
- a. First floor:
    - (1) Drawing room at the right front: Wooden trim of doorways and windows is similar. There are two windows on each outer wall, one doorway to the hall, and one on each side of the fireplace. An architrave with two fascias carries around the opening; the outer fascia is decorated with gouge work alternating with plain areas. Outside of this architrave is a pilaster at each jamb, on a plinth, with base mouldings, reeded colonnette in a panel, and Corinthianesque capitals. These pilasters carry a full entablature, which breaks out over the pilasters. The architrave has a single fascia decorated with gouge work fluting. The frieze has a slightly projecting center panel; the whole is

decorated with elaborate gouge work employing fan motifs. In the cornice are ornate dentils and modillions; between the fascia and the corona is a narrow band with gouge marks giving the effect of beading. Doors have 6 panels, moulded, with narrow mouldings applied near the edges of the panels.

The wooden fireplace trim has a background plane projecting slightly from the wall, on which are planted pilasters similar to those on the door trim but smaller in scale, and paneled with a wheat-ear-drops motive in low relief. The entablature breaks out over the pilasters and returns against the wall around the corners of the background plane. The architrave has two fascias ornamented with gouge work and a carved egg and dart moulding at the top. The frieze has a projecting center panel ornamented in relief with reclining figures in an informally balanced rinceau motive. On either side of this is a swag. The blocks over the pilasters contain putti--one on each. In the cornice are ornate dentils, and a narrow carved rope moulding above them.

The wooden wainscot has panels similar to those of the doors; the plinth and base mouldings continue those of the door and window trim. The dado rail is ornamented with paterae and fluting in gouge work.

A plaster cornice extends around the room, consisting of three ornamental bands separated by mouldings. The lower band has a row of upright acanthus leaves, the middle band a row of similar smaller acanthus leaves--in full relief. The upper band contains a flattened helical ribbon and floral motive, in low relief.

- (2) Room at the left front: The wainscoting, doors and mantel are quite similar to those in the drawing room. Door and window openings have wooden architrave trim, reeded. The room cornice is moulded plaster.
- (3) Stair hall: Door openings have moulded architrave trim of wood. A plaster cornice extends around the front portion to the stair well, containing ornamental modillions with acanthus leaves, alternating with rosettes. The frieze is ornamented in relief with swags and floral motifs. On the ceiling near the front is an ornamental plaster circle with swags of a type commonly found in Adam interiors.

- (4) Right rear room: There is a plaster cornice with plain mouldings, a wooden mantel with Doric pilasters, with dentils in the mantel cornice and diagonal reeding on the architrave. Doors and windows have architrave trim. The paneled wooden wainscot has a dado rail with diagonal reeding.
- (5) Left rear room: This appears to have been similar to the right rear room, except for vertical reeding along the dado rail, but has suffered from modern alterations.

b. Second floor:

- (1) Right room: Doors and windows have wood architrave trim, with mouldings; doors are six-panel. The mantel has a background plane similar to those described above; pilasters have two reeded vertical panels, with upright elliptical paterae in the neck above them substituting for a capital. The architrave has two fascias, with a carved guilloche band along the upper one. The frieze is decorated with elaborate gouge work in circles, semicircles and ellipses, as well as the spandrels between them, all treated with fan-like motifs. The architrave and frieze break over the pilasters, and the cornice breaks over the center panel in the frieze as well. The cornice has ornate dentils.

There is a wood paneled wainscot with a swag motive executed in gouge work along the dado rail. The delicate wooden cornice around the room has modillions with elliptical paterae on the soffits and ornate dentils; on the frieze is a swag motive in gouge work.

- (2) Left room: This is generally similar to the right room but with simpler detailing. The wood cornice has plain mouldings, dentils, and gouge work frieze. The mantel has reeded pilasters, with a patera over each and one in the central frieze block.

- c. Attic: There is a simple wooden base board and simple trim around openings. Doors are board and batten.



6. Hardware: Doors throughout are hung on two cast iron butts and have cast iron box locks, of two sizes. One of the locks, in the right room on the second floor, has the name "BRANFORD" on the casting. Some doorknobs are ceramic, others appear to be iron. Some sash have small cast iron locks on the meeting rail, probably not original.
7. Utilities: Modern electric lighting and steam heating radiators are in evidence; the original heating was presumably by the fireplaces.

Prepared by Harley J. McKee  
Architect, N. P. S.  
July, 1962